

The Price of Loyalty

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Summary: Describe's John's struggle between loyalty and friendship. This is a proposed situation that did not actually occur, but instead tries to capture John's decisions and feelings. My first story please read and review.

The Price of Loyalty

A little one-shot fiction regarding the Master Chief and his strict obedience to military protocol.

I felt that this question must be addressed. This is not a real situation, but a probable condition the Chief might have found himself when he was in training. It also involves Dr. Halsey's obsession with the SPARTAN project and the level she would go to simply have her research succeed.

I know it is a little extreme, but this was exaggerated to make a point. Hey, it's my first fanfiction, so go easy on me.

I love HALO!!!!!!!!!! ITS SO AWESOME!!!!!!!!!!

The Price of Loyalty (The Shadow Warrior)

"I have received approval from the ONI brass regarding the surgical enhancements for the SPARTAN candidates. We will go ahead with this as soon as possible," said Doctor Halsey. The head of the SPARTAN II project shuffled through a pile of disorganized reports while waiting from the response from the figure that sat at the other side of the desk. The air in the underground office was kept at an icy 15 degrees centigrade year round, forcing the doctor to draw her lab coat in closer to herself. The man on the other side wore the uniform of a Chief Petty Officer and the letters "Mendez" were stitched on his right breast. Mendez peered back over in the dim florescent lighting.

"I believe they are ready. They have learned well. I have never

trained a better group of recruits in my life. Damn best fighters in the entire military. I've gotten them ready for anything that I could think of. It's a shame to seem them go on to the surgery. I do have one question, thoughâ€¦" Mendez smiled faintly at the mention of his trainees. It was probably the closest to an emotional outburst from the stone-faced officer.

"What is that, Chief?"

"I've taught them to kill, to work as a team, and to take the fight to enemy in every way I know. But there's always been that lingering doubt. Could they sacrifice everything for the UNSC? I know that they are willing to give their lives. But could they watch a teammate die from their own hands? There are people that doubt this, Catherine. People in the highest ranks of the UNSC just want SPARTAN II to fail. If the subjects show any signs of faltering, they'll terminate this project. They want proof that this will succeed." The smile disappeared from Mendez's face. He sat straight up in his chair like a soldier at attention and he looked intently at the Doctor.

Doctor Halsey signed and took off her glasses. It had been too many hard decisions from the beginning. Now, she was faced again with the life of a soldier in the balance. She rubbed her tired eyes and looked up at the ceiling. Yet there was no turning back from her first fateful choice to kidnap 75 children for this project. They had all gone too far. In her mind, this was only another minor issue to overcome. The Doctor put her glasses back on and stared at Mendez with determination.

"Go ahead. But I want 117 to do accomplish this task. If you want to test the loyalty of anyone, test the loyalty of the leader," she pleaded. In her heart, she had always found the recruit attracting in a primitive sense, but this was the first time her feelings for him affected her judgment. The words had come out so naturally that she didn't have time to check her speech. John was always someone special, even though she could not express it in words. She could never lose him.

"Very well. I will call him to this office immediately," grunted the Petty Officer in a monotone. He reached for his communicator.

_Send SPARTAN trainee 117 to Doctor Halsey's office immediately. This is an important matter. _Mendez's voice had a hint of regret in it. For him, no matter how much combat experience he had, it was always painful to watch a soldier die.

"Who will be the target?" asked Halsey in a quiet voice that bordered on a whisper.

"I cannot choose one of my soldiers to die, ma'm. It's hard enough ordering something like this to take place. Let the computer choose. I just can't do this," muttered Mendez.

"So be it. Deja, randomly choose a SPARTAN candidate for this mission." Halsey averted her eyes from the selection screen.

"Selection complete," the AI chimed as if performing a normal system check. All AIs had an automatic emotion override system to assure that they followed orders. Whatever Deja thought at that moment, she

could not express it. The picture of the chosen SPARTAN appeared on the central holographic projector.

A hologram of a tall, dark skinned trainee appeared on the small projector that lay on the doctor's desk. Halsey squinted carefully at the small words that were labeled on the trainee's uniform. For a moment her vision blurred as she tried to focus in on the minute details. Then the identity of this mysterious figure became clear:

Samuel-034.

"Waste of fine men," grumbled Mendez, but he said nothing more.

"Whyâ€¦ I didn't mean for John to suffer this way. He had always mentioned that Sam was his best friend in the program. But SPARTAN can't be canceled now. These children, they are the only thing that will keep the UNSC together. We have to sacrifice a few for the benefit of mankind. In the end, all they have been through will be worth it." Halsey's speech now had a sense of renewed confidence and determination. Did she actually believe her own selfish words? She suddenly shrank back into her chair, realizing that she had put the success of her own project in front of everything else.

"Doctor, if I may request, that I tell 117 about this. I know that you care for him and all, ma'm, but as their trainer, I feel that I have the obligation to make John see all sides of the serviceâ€¦ Including this." Mendez continued to sit in his normally rigid position, but there was something about his eyes that gave away his feelings. The brown eyes were soft and dull, conveying his personal disapproval about the issue.

_We have the trainee you requested. Awaiting further orders, _ crackled the communicator.

_Bring him in, _the Petty Officer replied.

The heavy metal door creaked on its hinges as a young teenager was brought into the office by two muscular Marine trainers. John's uniform was ripped in several places and his blond hair was in its typical unruly state. His blue eyes gleamed with adrenaline. Halsey observed that the boy had again been sparring with the other SPARTANs. He was always looking for somebody to fight. It was this instinct for battle that motivated the Doctor to choose him as one of the first candidates for the program

"Sit down, John. Chief Mendez has an important mission that you must accomplish in order to proceed." Number 117 sat obediently down in the seat next to the Petty Officer.

"Sure, chief. What do you have for me today? Just make sure it is hard. The last time you sent me on a mission, I only had to run 30 miles back to base. Maybe something like dropping the team in the mountain range? That will be a challenge. But remember, I ****always**** win," said the SPARTAN. His grin haunted Halsey of the coin-toss game she had played long ago with the young child during her search for possible children for the program. Back then, she had reminded herself that the boy's innocence would soon be dead when he lost the life he knew to join the UNSC. Doctor Halsey knew that this new

mission would do as much to bury that innocence as that first traumatic encounter.

"Listen here, 117. Today, you will be on a new type of mission. I'm going to tell the truth about this. There are some people who doubt your loyalty to the service."

"But-Chief! I am loyal to the Marines. We are willing to serve and give our lives. It is our duty to protect the people of Earth," recited John.

"I know, son. But some people want proof. It is not that I doubt you. They- they want you to eliminate somebody. This is not meant for the team, but for you. If you succeed, your success will be accepted as the success for the entire team. Here is the person you have been required to kill." Mendez turned and pointed to the small holographic projector. John sat up and looked carefully at the miniature figure. He then stared at the Chief and laughed.

"Is this a joke, Chief? Is this another prank? I'm not falling for that again. Let me guess--"

"I'm sorry," whispered Mendez and slowly shook his head. Number 117's joyful expression vanished from his tanned face and was replaced by one of despair.

"You have twelve hours to complete this task. Please do not take this personally, John. Your accomplishments will allow this project to continue. Now you must choose between your friendship and fulfilling your purpose. And you know what is your ultimate decision," Doctor Halsey said. She knew John trusted him, if not as a military commander, but a respected civilian in his life.

The SPARTAN did not respond to neither of them. Instead, Number 117 raised his right hand in a stiff salute to the Petty Officer and walked stiffly out of the room. As the door shut behind John, Mendez rose from his seat and muttered a few terse words of parting. He strolled quickly out the door and towards the surface elevator. Doctor Halsey sat alone in her office, thinking about what she had just done.

Nobody could hear her crying.

* * *

>He had no family. He could not remember his past life. There was only one family now: the UNSC. The SPARTAN teammates were the closest thing to brothers and sisters. Yet there was one thing that had greater precedence than his closeness to his friends. Winning. Failing a mission was incomprehensible to him. His victories were the last residue of his childhood. Accomplishment was the only thing he knew.<p><p>

Light spilled into the elevator car that ran from within the mountain to the surface above. John stepped out into the glaring sunshine. It was a warm day, perfect for a training exercise. He walked briskly towards the Marine barrack complexes. A small group of children wearing camouflage suits lay on the lawn, repairing and cleaning out their weapons. One of the female SPARTANS waved to John as he approached.

"You missed out on a great fight. After you left, the trainers made us fight Charlie Company again! It was capture the flag this time. We won, of course. I got two kills and Linda sniped four of them. You won't believe how angry they were! But they couldn't even touch us." Kelly smiled at the Master Chief. He looked away and noted that a burial detail was busy moving black body bags onto a truck. The Marines glanced back at number 117 with hatred burning in their eyes. They were beginning to recognize him from the numerous battles the SPARTANS had with the conventional troops.

"Everybody up! We're moving out. You have one hour in your quarters before the next exercise. Don't waste your time, SPARTANS," shouted John. His leadership was not official, but the others easily accepted him as the unspoken commander of their team. The children stood up and walked rapidly towards their barracks. Number 117 spotted Samuel as he obediently followed the group. John wanted to run up and talk to him, but he decided against it. He could not let his emotions get in the way of completing a mission.

Number 117 entered his sleeping quarters. A long row of bunks lined the length of the room. He approached his personal area near the end of the room. His weapons rack hung above his bunk. All the weapons were expertly cleaned and polished. John reached for his .45 caliber pistol and silencer. He threaded the silencer onto the barrel of the gun and slapped a clip into the handle of the pistol in one smooth motion.

For a second, he hesitated when he was about to leave the sleeping quarters. His movements were heavy as if his muscles were too tired to move. John reached out for his combat communicator, but his fingers slipped harmlessly off the edges of the device. As he stood motionlessly in the empty room, the memories of his indoctrination as a defender of the UNSC flooded back into his mind. The fear, the panic, and most of all, the regret. It was not his will to be chosen into this program. He had abandoned his family, his friends, and everything he had known before. He did not want to be called Number 117 and complete endless military drills for the rest of his life. Most of all, he did not want to be hated and feared by the rest of humanity as part of a freak show. He wanted a way out of this insanity.

Instinctively, he put the pistol next to his head. This war was not his war to fight. He was only one out of the billions of UNSC citizens. Why not one of them instead of him? If he died, there would be one to replace him. Nobody really cared about him. John's finger reached for the trigger. He was about to leave his life of torture and insanity when his instinct for winning overrode his feelings. Giving up now was surrendering to life. And he would never surrender.

Number 117 lowered the pistol and walked rapidly to the exit of the room. To prevent arising suspicion among the others, he put the pistol into his belt holster. The normally busy hallways were empty this time because most of the SPARTANS were outside talking to each other and studying their military history. John's footsteps echoed in the dead hallways and created an effect that mimicked the approach of many people at once. He stopped at a door that was marked: SPARTAN Barracks Numbers 20 through 40.

John slowly pushed the door open and glanced inside. There was only one shadow cast by the ray of sunlight that sifted through the only window of the room. Samuel-034 whirled around to look at the intruder.

"John, what happened to you today? I heard that you were gone for a while, and we had to go on another mission. Anyways, what did Mendez call you in for? Does he have another task for us to accomplish?" Sam had changed out from the heavy stealth uniform the SPARTANs were wearing earlier and now was wearing a military jumpsuit. He held the half-folded stealth uniform in his hands while he spoke.

John whipped out the silenced pistol from his holster and pointed it level at number 034. The other drew back in surprise from this sudden movement. Sam looked suspiciously at John and did not move.

"What are you doing-" Number 034 halted when he understood what John was about to do. Sam stood steady and firm with dignity to await his final fate. Death was something they were all prepared for. Number 117 stepped forward towards his target.

John's hand wavered for a second when he noticed the way his teammate accepted the end of his life. He felt his composure waver for a second and his arm lower to his side. He again told himself that he had to put winning over everything else. He had his orders.

His arm tensed and moved the pistol level with Sam's head. Number 117's hand hesitated for a moment and then contracted to pull the trigger. The bullet shot noiselessly out of the tip of the silencer and passed through number 034's skull, instantly ending his life. John felt the blood spray and put up his left arm in front of his face.

When he looked out from behind his arm, he saw the body of his friend lying on the ground. Surprisingly, he felt no remorse for his actions. He was a soldier, and soldiers follow orders. Nothing else mattered to him anymore. He pulled out his communicator and spoke into it.

Mission Accomplished. John had won the most important battle of his life: the battle over his emotions. Something had hardened in his mind over this past hour. No longer did he care for anybody in his life. He was left only with his loyalty to the service, and he clung to that like a drowning man clinging to a life raft. It would be the only dedication he would have for the rest of his life.

A piece of Sam's uniform drifted through the air and landed on his shoulder. With a simple brush of his hand, number 117 erased all memories of friendship from his brain.

There was only one thought, one desire, one motivation left.

Kill.

End
file.